CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for authenticating a document, comprising the steps of:

generating a document key by examining one or more physical attributes of a physical media that underlies the document;

imparting an original image onto the physical media such that the original image enables recovery of the document key.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of imparting comprises the steps of:

generating a digital signature using the document key and a private key that corresponds to the document;

encoding the digital signature into the original image.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of imparting comprises the step of printing the document key on the physical media as the original image.

4. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of recording the document key along with a description of the document.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of verifying the document by performing the steps of:

generating the document key by examining the physical attributes of the physical media;

obtaining a recovered document key from the original image;

comparing the document key to the recovered document key.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of generating a document key comprises the step of examining paper fiber patterns in the physical media.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the step of examining paper fiber patterns comprises the step of examining paper fiber patterns in each of a set of predetermined areas of the physical media.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of imparting comprises the steps of:

generating a digital signature using the document key and a shared secret key that corresponds to the document;

encoding the digital signature into the original image.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the physical media is paper.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of generating a document key comprises the step of examining density differences of the physical media.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of generating a document key comprises the step of

examining a unique pattern imparted in the physical media.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of examining a unique pattern comprises the step of examining a pattern of a reflective substance in the physical media.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of examining a unique pattern comprises the step of examining a pattern of UV ink in the physical media.

14. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of examining a unique pattern comprises the step of examining a set of predetermined shapes printed in predetermined positions on the physical media.

15. The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of measuring the predetermined positions and encoding the predetermined in the document key.

16. An apparatus for authenticating a document, comprising:

imager that generates a set of pixel data values in response to a document;

document key generator that generates a document key by examining the pixel data values to detect one or more physical attributes of a physical media that underlies the document thereby enabling the document key to be imparted in an original image onto the document.

17. An apparatus for authenticating a document, comprising:

imager that generates a set of pixel data values in response to a document;

document key generator that generates a document key by examining the pixel data values to detect one or more physical attributes of a physical media that underlies the document thereby enabling the document key to be compared to a recovered document key obtained from the document.